

Carol Benedict, *Golden-Silk Smoke: A History of Tobacco in China, 1550-2010*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: California University Press (A Philip E. Lilienthal Book in Asian Studies), 2011, XIII + 334 pp.

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In his *Briefwechsel meist statistischen Inhalts* (Göttingen 1775-1781) August Ludwig von Schlözer (vol. 3, p. 153) came to the following conclusion: "Eine aus den Quellen geschöpfte Geschichte des Tabaks [...] ist [...] für die Welthistorie wenigstens ein ebenso anziehender Gegenstand als die Geschichte des großen Tamerlan's, oder die des alten Aßyrischen Kaiserreichs." ("A history of tobacco drawn from the sources [...] is [...] for the history of the world at least as attractive a subject as the history of the great Tamerlane, or that of the old Assyrian empire.") This cannot be denied, and in many respects this book by Carol Benedict is a confirmation of Schlözer's suggestion.

Marginal as this subject may appear to be for many Sinologists, the really surprising thing is that the first standard work on tobacco in China has taken so long to appear, especially as there have long been studies of other parts of Asia. There is, after all, an immense quantity of source material available, ranging from imperial decrees, propaganda posters, local chronicles and household data to short stories and newspaper articles.

In order to back up her arguments, Carol Benedict (Georgetown University) was therefore faced with a formidable task. However, she has done the job thoroughly and has discovered and used plenty of written sources that are not part of the standard repertoire of historians. I learned a lot from reading this book.

The chapters in the book have different focuses and use different methodological approaches. There are chapters devoted to the history of trade (chap. 1), cultural history (chap. 3), the history of medicine (chap. 4), social history (chap. 7), literary history (chap. 8) and gender history (chap. 9). This provides variety, but it can also lead to a lack of rigor. As a result, there are many points that are considered and skilfully analysed, but then only partially embedded in the particular context.

Thus one may receive the erroneous impression that this is a collection of articles on the topic written for different purposes by the author. This is not the case, and yet the incoherence of the argumentation does tend to give the impression of a number of essays that are only loosely connected with each other. This does not make our appreciation of the topic easier, and a concentration on the late imperial and early Republican period, i.e. the period in which Carol Benedict has specialized, would perhaps have been advantageous. The two dates mentioned in the title (1550 and 2010) are in any case not crucial turning points in respect of tobacco consumption in China. Alternatively, a decision in favour of a single historical perspective might have been a more convincing option.

This would also have facilitated the comparative approach that is mentioned several times by Carol Benedict in the "Introduction." For such an approach, the important thing is not just to include additional material, but to sharpen one's judgement through the comparisons that are made. For instance, in order to distinguish the specifically Chinese reaction to the phenomenon of tobacco from other forms of cultural acceptance, it would be more useful, I feel, to take a look at Japan and the Ottoman Empire rather than Great Britain and the USA.

If it was the author's primary intention to examine cultural and social processes of transformation in the different periods, then a more detailed consideration of other stimulants—especially betel and opium—would have been enlightening. I would also be interested to know why pipes, cigarettes and snuff became popular in China, but not cigars, as in Burma or the Philippines.

We may add that this book is not so much "A History of Tobacco in China" as "A History of the Use of Tobacco by Han Chinese." The traditions of the minorities are largely ignored, while even the tension between Han and Manchus with regard to the use of stimulants is not really explored in any detail.

Smoking—and how to stop smoking—plays a role in literature, and there is of course a wealth of short stories and essays about this from the Republican period. I would like to add here just three examples which Carol Benedict does not consider in detail: *Zhiyan de mimi* 紙煙的秘密 (Zhang Lilan, 1934), *Jieyan* 戒煙 (Liang Shiqiu, 1937) and *Diyi zhi yan* 第一支煙 (Zhou Suofei, 1946). This is quite understandable given the limited amount of space available to her. But it is also regrettable, because so many motifs are briefly touched on but not thoroughly examined. In this connection I would also like to mention to the Zurich master's thesis *Rauchzeichen über China* (Erol Güz, 2001), which contains a large number of source materials in translation.

The book contains twenty black-and-white pictures. In my view there could have been more, but the selection criteria would need to be more

carefully considered. In chronological and regional terms, and in their social context, they do not always seem justified by the text, and they are surely not very representative, since two thirds of them show women smoking, of whom the majority can be described as elegant, young and good-looking.

Once again, I learned a lot from reading this book. Though I think that the subject could have been presented more systematically, there is no doubt that it makes good reading.